**Introduction to the Lerner Family Circle Record**
**By Paul Silverman**

My great-grandmother, Sara Rosenstock Lerner, immigrated to the United States with all but one of her children during the first decade of the 20th century. Sara's oldest son, Morris Lerner, remained in eastern Europe and eventually settled with his wife and two sons in Germany. By 1935, the oppression of Jews in Nazi Germany had already reached alarming proportions. Many Jews sought to escape, primarily seeking refuge in Palestine, England, or the United States. American anti-Semitism at that time was itself unwelcoming to German Jews. The Lerner Family Circle was organized in the fall of 1935 primarily to facilitate the passage of Morris Lerner and his family to the United States. Their goal was to raise the funds necessary and overcome the bureaucratic obstacles to accomplish the reunification of the Lerner family in the United States. Like the majority of American Jews during the first half of the 20th century, the Lerners lived in New York and New Jersey, centered primarily in Newark. My mother, Ann Shwam Silverman Greiff, served as secretary of the Lerner Family Circle from October 1935 to July 1936.

It was not until my mother passed away in 1990, as I was going through her effects, that I discovered a black, hard-bound notebook engraved simply with the word "Record" on its front cover. The notebook contained the minutes recorded by my mother through a 9-month period in 1935-36. The minutes reveal a historic, tragic tale of family unity and commitment to save Morris Lerner and his family. Since its discovery, the digital age and the Internet have come into prominence. With the help of Dan Silverman, a typist was found to transcribe the 71-pages of my mother's handwritten text. With Dan's support, I am pleased to present the digitized transcription of the minutes here.

My mother had an exemplary handwriting and substantial English language skills for a bi-lingual woman with a 7th-grade education. While proofreading the text, however, I exercised the editorial prerogative, to the best of my knowledge, of correcting misspellings to relieve the reader of unnecessary distractions. Ann's choice of language, however, remains unchanged. For those who wish to examine the original document in her own hand, we are also publishing a PDF file of the scanned, hard copy of the original. We are also posting a chart that graphically illustrates the relationships among the persons identified in the minutes who attended the family circle meetings. The hard copy original itself is secured safely by my son Noah. As you read about finances in the document, it is well to remember that the family circle meetings took place in the midst of the Great Depression.

Regrettably, no record of subsequent meetings of the Lerner Family Circle has survived. Thus I'm obliged to give away the dramatic conclusion of the effort to free Morris Lerner and his family which had not as yet unfolded when my mother's recordkeeping came to an end. The effort to procure visas for the four members of Morris's family was abandoned, resulting, shockingly, from resistance by the U.S. State Department to issue visas to the elder Lerners. A new strategy was adopted in which the Lerner sons would be brought to the United States and, upon their safe

arrival, a renewed effort would be made to bring over Morris and his wife. Morris's younger son Martin did successfully immigrate to the U.S. whereas the older son made it safely to Palestine.

Despite the sustained and valiant effort by the Lerner Family Circle, Morris and his wife perished in the Holocaust.

The surviving Lerner descendants already living in the 1940's recall that the Lerner Family Circle thrived well beyond the years documented in writing. The mood of the family swung radically in the post-war era and could best be characterized as a time of song, laughter, and good cheer.